TELLS THE FACTS AND NAMES THE NAMES

CounterPunch

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Is Nixonland Still What It Was?

By Alexander Cockburn

Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America*. Scribner: 2008, 881 pp.

The first page of Rick Perlstein's extremely long book succinctly sets forth his purpose, which is to explain how "the battle lines that define our culture and politics" were set between Lyndon Johnson's landslide victory of 1964 and Richard Nixon's mirror victory in 1972. His last page offers a gloomy overview of these same battle lines: "What Richard Nixon left behind was the very terms of our national self-image: a notion that there are two kinds of Americans" – on the one hand, the "Silent Majority… the middle-class, middle Americans, suburban, exurban, and rural coalition," designated by Perlstein in the end as Republicans; on the other, "the 'liberals,' the 'cosmopolitans,' the 'intellectuals,' the 'professionals' – 'Democrats.'"

Nixon, so Perlstein's thesis runs, was the Capability Brown of American politics in the postwar era, reshaping the landscape. *Nixonland*'s last sentences have an apocalyptic timbre: "Do Americans not hate each other enough to fantasize about killing one another, in cold blood, over political and cultural disagreements? It would be hard to argue they do not. How did Nixonland end? It has not ended yet."

Perlstein invites us to scrutinize the era through two lenses, rather like the spectacles that Ronald Reagan, himself second only to Nixon as a creator of Nixonland, wore at political rallies – one lens to focus on the crowd; the other to read the speech before him on the dais. When Perlstein focuses on Nixon, he is often brilliantly sharp, particularly on the formative years of this weird, messed-up

COCKBURN CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

One Cheer for Sarah Palin

By Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair

Sure, we know. She's a wolf killer, bear hunter, would-be driller in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. She backs the Pebble Creek gold mine, scheduled as the world's largest, right next to the salmon-rich bay after which she and Todd named their second daughter Bristol. (It's the site of Todd's family commercial fishing operation, which is why Sarah's in-laws are considering two votes for Obama, who has come out against the mine.) She tried to get the former brother-in-law bounced from his job as a cop. Nobody's perfect. After all, she was only runner-up in the Ms. Alaska competition in '86.

But the liberal attacks on Palin are absurd to the point of lunacy.

Experience. Given the highly experienced maniacs who have been destroying this country and the rest of the world decade after decade, one would have thought that the E word would be an immediate disqualification. Who was more experienced in government than George Bush Sr. or, before him, Richard Nixon? We hold no brief for Harry Truman, unlike the liberals who've turned him into an icon. But who was more inexperienced than this hack pol created by the Pendergast machine in Kansas City, Missouri? And remember, McCain turned to Palin when it became clear that the Republican Party's Christian base would never accept his first choice, the experienced Joe Lieberman. In our book, that's a huge plus for Palin.

At its best, American populism is irreverent to power and never more bracing than when suggesting that one of the regular, ordinary folks could do it better. That's the constituency in Alaska that responded to Palin and which put her in the governor's mansion. Liberals who don't follow Alaska politics probably don't understand the extent of her achievement. She took down the great power in her own party, Gov. Murkowski. Only Lousiana, another oil rich state, outstrips Alaska in luxuriant corruption, and for years Alaska was run by Ted Stevens, Frank Murkowski and Don Young. Palin outmaneuvered them all in four years, which took courage and cunning.

This trio was in the pockets of the oil companies, which were not happy to see them go. Palin, while an ardent supporter of drilling, has taken a more populist approach, for the first time levying a state tax on oil industry profits and returning this as rebates to Alaska residents. To put it mildly, this is unusual in American politics, and you have to go back to the Southern populists and, indeed, to Louisiana and Huey Long to find precedents.

Barack Obama apparently took notice of what Palin was doing as governor of Alaska. His energy plan lifts three central elements from her program: a windfall profits' tax on the oil companies, an energy rebate tax, and the development of a transcontinental natural gas pipeline from Prudhoe Bay across Canada to the Midwest. Palin publicly praised Obama for his plan, though the story in the *Anchorage Daily News* about this endorsement has since been removed from her website for obvious reasons.

Much of the venom against Palin is clearly class-based. Sarah and her husband Todd – a quarter Yu'pik – are working class. So, from the elites, we get endless sermons on the theme that somehow McCain's choice is "an insult" to American women, particularly feminists. Why wasn't the candidacy of Hillary Clinton, the most endlessly submissive and humiliated wife in the nation's political history – at least on the public record – derided as "an insult" to feminist aspi-

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Californian. It was at Whittier, a Quaker college, that Nixon made his essential discovery. Whittier had its elite, "a circle of swells who called themselves the Franklins ... and who were well-rounded, graceful, moved smoothly, talked slickly. Nixon's new club, the Orthogonians, was for the strivers, those not to the manner born, the commuter students like him."

Nixon figured correctly that for every stylish Franklin there were a dozen Orthogonians. There was his Silent Majority and he made his political name playing the Orthogonian card, most famously against the upper-class State Department official Alger Hiss, whom freshly elected U.S. Congressman Nixon accused of being a Communist spy and who got sent to prison for perjury.

Perlstein's larger historical focus is less satisfactory. We chug through the Sixties and early Seventies, and the vistas on offer are awfully familiar from the scores of contemporary accounts, profusely cited by Perlstein in his many pages of footnotes. His rewrites of history's first rough drafts are too often bland and humdrum. As a historian, he can be sloppy too. Of the infamous 1969 Altamont concert played by the Rolling Stones outside San Francisco, he writes, "Hells Angeles beat hippies to death with pool cues." No hippy at Altamont died in this fashion.

So far as the radicals are concerned – the inspirational villains of Nixonland – Perlstein's rewrites of history strangely omit many of them, or scoot past them with a quick glance. The reason, I suspect, is that Perlstein doesn't particularly care for radicals. One of his heroes, invoked as such in his dedication, is the journalist Paul Cowan who died in his 40s. Cowan wrote for the *Village Voice* in the mid-70s, when I worked for the same publication. In this past-Vietnam moment, quite a number of youngish writers – Cowan among them – sidled away from the stentorian radicalism of the preceding years. In the first flush of post-60s readjustment, they preferred to stigmatize noisy draft-card burners, Black Panthers and the like, to suggest that the Silent Majority did have some legitimate grudges.

But is he right to say Nixonland "has not ended yet," that Americans are as ready to kill each other in cold blood as they were 40 years ago?

A dislike of radicals could explain Perlstein's otherwise inexplicable omission from his vast bibliography of Andrew Kopkind, by far the best journalist the American left produced in the Sixties and Seventies, and one who wrote many brilliant essays precisely on Perlstein's themes. But Kopkind was a genuine radical and Perlstein a sedate and modestly liberal Democrat.

The most vivid words in *Nixonland* come from Spiro Agnew, Nixon's vice president and the man assigned the task of ratcheting up the angers of the Silent Majority to maximum volume, in sentences mostly crafted for him by Nixon's speechwriters, Pat Buchanan and William Safire, who handed Agnew mock-heroic lines such as "The troglodytic leftists who dominate Congress ... work themselves into a lather over an alleged shortage of nutriments in a child's box of Wheaties."

Perlstein is good at evoking Nixon's political antennae, supersensitive to the fears and resentments of those who felt threatened, patronized, passed over in a turbulent time. But is he right to say Nixonland "has not ended yet," that Americans are as ready to kill each other in cold blood as they were 40 years ago? Of course the American landscape is rent by the vast fissures of race and class. Politicians exploited them long before Nixon was born, and they exploit them still. Hillary Clinton addressed the same constituencies and the same fears as the Alabama populist demagogue George Wallace did, back in the late 1960s. The major card in John McCain's hand features the color of Obama's skin, and it's not at all inconceivable that this card could put him into the White House.

But the contours have changed all the same. These days, the blue-collar workers from the industrial unions who beat up the anti-war hippies in the late Sixties wear earrings and long hair, use weed and meth, drink cappuccino and buy Chardonnay as well as Budweiser. Their unions fade in strength from year to year. Blue-collar America is far lower in the water. The largest demonstrations last year weren't against the Iraq war, which a high percentage of Americans oppose, but were conducted by immigrants. Nixonland is an iffy proposition these days. Many of its former residents face foreclosure and search for new abodes. It's a different, less strident, less violent, less creative time.

CP

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Defending Western Shoshone Lands for the Seven Generations

Carrie Dann's Oral History of the Western Shoshone, as told to Julie Fishel and Brenda Norrell

In the vast lands of the Western Shoshone, where the mountains are now being cored out by gold corporations, Carrie Dann comes through the door like a flame of fire. When Carrie comes down from the mountain, the power of the struggle comes with her. Carrie Dann remembers the history of her people, when the Shoshone people were nearly wiped out by small pox. "Yellow scarves was passed out to the Western Shoshone people, they were contaminated with the small pox. We were told that our people died like flies. Where the gold mine is today, the people died like flies. Today the United States government is offering us bread crumbs for our land – for our life – because that is what land is, it is life."

Carrie, executive director of the nonprofit Western Shoshone Defense Project, lives in the center of Western Shoshone territory. A hard-working rancher, mother and grandmother, she worked alongside her sister Mary Dann, mending fences and ranching through the blowing snow and harsh winters. Mary passed to the Spirit World on April 22, 2005, in a ranching accident. The sisters spent their lives battling the United States government, military, nuclear industry and gold corporations.

During a lifetime of struggle, in February of 2003, the United States claimed the Danns were trespassing on their own lands and unleashed a helicopter roundup of the Danns' horses and wild horses of Pine Valley. It resulted in a stampede, leading to premature births of foals and horses being crushed. By the end of the day, the US had confiscated 500 horses. Later, the carcasses of 50 of those horses were found. They had starved to death. After that, Carrie says, "Mary went down real fast."

The Western Shoshone took their case to the United Nations in Geneva. The U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, CERD, ruled in March of 2006 in favor of the Western Shoshone. The Early Warning and Urgent Action Decision urged the United States to immediately freeze, desist and stop any further actions against the Western Shoshone people, including efforts to seize or privatize their lands. Although the U.N. Committee ordered the United States to stop and initiate dialogue with the Western Shoshone, the United States government has not complied.

Here is Carrie Dann's story:

"My sister and I have been fighting in a battle we were born into as indigenous people on Turtle Island (United States). The struggle of the Western Shoshone Nation is the struggle of all indigenous peoples. It is not just about abuse of power and economics – it is about the stripping away of our spirit. It is about being forced to live in two worlds – the real world and a world of made up laws and legal constructs, which attempt to render us invisible. Laws, which claim to transfer power from the sacred things to the almighty dollar. When we have been beaten down, time and time again, when we have to stand by and watch our world and our people collapsing in front of us, the one thing that keeps us going is our spiritual beliefs, our knowledge of the traditional teachings. Mary and I were raised by our grandmother, Mary Hall, who lived a traditional lifestyle until the day she passed to the Spirit World, and our mom and dad.

"We've been here since time immemorial. I was born here and this is where I'll die."

"What our grandmother taught us is that we, the Shoshone people, Newe in our language, were placed here on this land, Newe Sogobia, as caretakers. We were placed as caretakers of the lands, the animals, all the living things; those things that cannot speak for themselves in this human language. We were placed here with a responsibility. In traditional indigenous society, there are four things that are sacred above all. Those things are the land, the air, the water and the sun.

"We see the earth as our mother, that which gives us all life. The water is like the blood in our veins, the air, that which nourishes the cycle of life and the sun, that which encourages growth and replenishment. Without any one of these things, there would be no life; these things are sacred above all. This is our religion – our spirituality – and it defines who we are as a people.

"Our people, the Western Shoshone, are in the midst of a decades' long struggle to retain our homeland, Newe Sogobia. Our lands were never ceded, 'conquered,' nor abandoned. We continue to live and pray on these lands.

"In 1863, the United States entered into a Treaty of Peace and Friendship with the Western Shoshone, the Treaty of Ruby Valley. At the time, as I have been told, the U.S. did not realize there was anything of economic value in these lands. They simply wanted to cross the land to get to California. Our ancestors agreed to let them cross, we agreed to some ranching, small towns, a railroad, a telegraph line and mining, as we understood it in 1863. In return, the U.S. recognized our land boundaries and agreed to fairly compensate the Shoshone people for U.S. activities and for the minerals taken from the ground."

Newe Sogobia stretches across about 60 million acres throughout Nevada, California, Utah and Idaho – from the Snake River in Idaho down to Death Valley, California. Despite this formal recognition of the Western Shoshone landbase, the U.S. now claims that these lands are "public" lands and is attempting to force a one time payment on the Western Shoshone through use of what is called the Indian Claims Commission.

"As a method of intimidation to silence our family and other Western Shoshone, the Department of Interior has been conducting military-type raids on Western Shoshone, seizing hundreds of cows and horses from the mountains and valleys of Shoshone country in the last several years. They have destroyed our economic livelihood and scared many Western Shoshone away from standing up for their rights."

"Currently, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, Newe Sogobia is the second largest gold-producing area in the world. When mining started in Nevada

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back in the 1800s, when our leaders signed the Treaty of Ruby Valley, it was with a pick and shovel – the damage was very little, and the land could heal again. Beginning in the 1960s, with the discovery of a process where companies could extract the microscopic gold in the earth, we had huge mining companies with the open-pit cyanide processes moved into our territory. Newmont, now the world's largest gold company, had its start in Newe Sogobia on what is called the Carlin Trend – in fact, the Carlin Mine was built by none other than the now infamous Bechtel Corporation. Currently, we have just about every major gold company in the world here – Newmont, Placer Dome and Barrick. The list goes on and on. So, our sacred land has given billions of dollars to the powerful companies for the sacrifice of the earth, air and water.

"So, in this struggle, we see a direct connection between the U.S. failure to uphold its agreements to respect our rights and the mining industry's effort to accumulate wealth. When it comes to mining, the U.S. government claims that, according to the 1872 mining law, they cannot say 'no' to a mine, even if it is a spiritual area, even if there are burial sites, and even if they will contaminate our waters. They can only tell the mining company to 'be careful.' I think that is ridiculous. The Western Shoshone never agreed to the 1872 mining law. That law is only applicable to federal or 'public' lands – not Western Shoshone lands.

"When we look at what the mining is doing to Newe Sogobia, we see not only the disrespect given to our people but also the destruction of sacred things. The mines take down whole mountains and dig huge open pits over a thousand feet deep and over a mile wide, where they pump tens of thousands of gallons of water per minute, detonate heavy explosive to loosen the rock, then crush the rock and pour cyanide over it to extract the gold. We have lost hunting and fishing areas, food and medicinal plants, the wildlife is disturbed by the toxins in the air and the lights and noise made by 24-hour mining drill rigs and digging. Burial sites have been disturbed, and many cultural artifacts have disappeared.

"The destruction of the water is especially painful to think about. In our traditional way, that our people have told us, the water in the earth's body is like blood in your veins. It's a life system within the earth. And they're taking it out. They are pumping out the essence of life so the multinational corporations can get richer. Our water table has dropped with some of our springs drying up. Most of the springs I used to drink from are no longer fit to drink and some are even posted, with the sign, 'Do not drink the water.'

"An example of just how arrogant these mines are is the behavior of Cortez Gold Mine (Barrick/Kennecott) in an area called Mount Tenabo and Horse Canyon. To us, all land is sacred, but there are certain areas that are very important and should not be disturbed. Mount Tenabo and Horse Canyon is one of those areas. Mount Tenabo has a long history of spiritual and cultural significance to our people. Caves on the mountain are part of our Creation story; our people have used the mountain for ceremony. We have gathered clay there for pottery. It is a landmark seen from many miles in every direction, located at the confluence of several Shoshone trails. We continue to use the mountain for hunting and gathering both foods and medicines, it continues to hold a spiritual and cultural relevance to us, in spite of the damage that has been inflicted upon it by previous mining. This mountain and its canyons should be respected and left alone.

Our homelands are basically being given to the gold companies at approximately $2.50-$5.00 an acre under the 1872 Mining Law. To us, they are priceless and can never be sold because no one has the right to sell the land and destroy that which is sacred and provides life to all.

"What the U.S. did to the Indian people historically was physical genocide – now, as they dump toxins on our lands and destroy our spiritual places, it is spiritual genocide. Our homelands are basically being given to the gold companies at approximately $2.50-$5.00 an acre under the 1872 Mining Law. The land and its minerals are actually worth billions. To us, they are priceless and can never be sold because no one has the right to sell the land and destroy that which is sacred and provides life to all.

"So far, our work, through the legal representation of the Indian Law Resource Center and the University of Arizona Indigenous Law and Policy Program, has brought the United States under direct international scrutiny on two separate occasions. One of these occasions was before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the other was this year before the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. In both instances, serious questions have been raised and decisions rendered with regard to U.S. Indian policy, its ongoing impairment of Indian rights and its incompatibility with international law and human rights.

"I believe that before we can seriously talk with the companies, they must re-

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spect our rights as indigenous people to this land. The fact of the matter is that the large scale, open-pit cyanide heap leach mining, the pumping of tens of thousands of gallons of water and the purchasing of lands for private property by gold companies has been taking place without our consent and in direct conflict with our concerns – which we have expressed over and over again.

"What we do here, in the U.S., affects all indigenous peoples. We must always keep this in mind. We must expose the illusions that the U.S. and the corporations have created around us all and we must educate people about the sacredness of things and the importance of protecting those things against any amount of money."

"Now we have the United States of America offering us 15 cents per acre for our life, because the land is life, water is life. But these are all the earth. The first government in the whole world that is making an offer to buy our birthrights – our rights as indigenous people. I wouldn't be surprised to the years that come that this type of practice by other nations of the world are even going to somewhere as to say, 'We are going to buy your rights whether you like it or not.' And that is what is facing us today.

"Now, let's look at what happened on the land. In the 1950s, they tested nuclear weapons on our land. Soon afterward, thousands of sheep died and the United States denied that it was nuclear testing. They called it atomic testing at the time. Nuclear testing, atomic testing. Millions of sheep died.

"Nuclear radiation causes cancer. Many people do have thyroid cancer. Many people are affected in different ways from radiation from the nuclear testing. Then they went underground with their nuclear tests.

"And I saw a lot of difference from the time they did put a test ban treaty into effect because we were in the livestock business. It was sad to see little calves come out deformed. It was sad. And then, we started to see the mama cows develop sickness within their own bodies. I think if these kinds of deformities are in the livestock, they can also be in the human children. It can happen to any child of the earth. Any one of us. We are all affected.

"The springs are drier in the mountains. It is devastating. The only life that can be up there is man because he can carry water on his back when he goes up there. The rest of the animals depend on the natural water source, which won't be there.

"With this nuclear testing, and nuclear waste dump [at Yucca Mountain], I don't feel safe at all. Now we have biological testing done at the test site, chemical warfare, all these kinds of testing are done there. I think it is wrong. I think these are crimes against humanity, and crimes against all life being perpetuated by the governments of the world. They have no right to do that. Governments are against the people, especially the poor, whom they think are weaker.

"The Western Shoshone, other indigenous people, and other people need to stand proud with dignity, and with honor of their families, their tribes.

"Deep inside, your tears fall. But after awhile you run out of tears. I used to hear the old folks talking about crying from within, from your heart. So, I assume now that this is all we have left. There are very little tears that we cry from within."
CP

Russia gets its Act Together

By Serge Halimi

The question of responsibility for the hostilities in the Caucasus apparently shouldn't worry us too much. Less than a week after Georgia's invasion, two well-known French commentators said it was old stuff. An influential neoconservative from the United States backed that view: knowing who started things "is not very important", wrote Robert Kagan. "This war did not begin because of a miscalculation by Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. It is a war that Moscow has been attempting to provoke for some time."

One hypothesis deserves another. If, on the day of the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, somebody else than Saakashvili, a graduate of New York's Columbia Law School, had started a war, would western capitals and their media have been able to contain righteous indignation at such a symbolic act?

History is easier to follow when goodies and baddies are decided in advance. The goodies, such as Georgia, have the right to defend their territorial integrity against the separatist struggles of their neighbors. The baddies, such as Serbia, must accept the self-determination of minority communities, or expect to be bombed by NATO. The moral of this story is even more enlightening when, to defend his country's borders, the charming pro-American Saakashvili recall some of the 2,000 soldiers he had sent to assist in the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

On August 16, President George Bush, speaking with gravity, rightly invoked the "Security Council resolutions of the United Nations," including the "sovereignty and independence and territorial integrity" of Georgia whose "borders should command the same respect as every other nation's." Like Iraq's?

Only the U.S. has the right to act unilaterally when it decides (or claims) that its security is at stake. In reality, events have followed a simpler plan: the U.S. plays for Georgia against Russia; Russia plays for South Ossetia and Abkhazia to "punish" Georgia.

Two Pentagon position papers have indicated a desire to prevent the resurgence of Russian power ever since 1992, when it was in ruins. To ensure that U.S. hegemony, which began with the first Gulf War and the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, became permanent, the Pentagon announced that it would be necessary to "convince likely rivals that they no longer need aspire to a greater role." If that didn't work, the U.S. would know how "to dissuade" them. And the main target was Russia, "the only power in the world which could destroy the U.S."

So, can we chide Russian leaders for bristling against Western help for the "color revolutions" of Ukraine and Georgia, the inclusion of former members of the Warsaw Pact in NATO, and the prospect of U.S. missiles on Polish soil – all of which were elements of the old U.S. strategy to weaken Russia, whatever its regime or its politics.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, the architect of the U.S.A.' risky strategy in Afghanistan, recently explained the other part of the U.S. grand design: "We have access through Georgia ... to the oil and soon also the gas that lies not only in Azerbaijan but beyond it in the Caspian Sea and beyond in Central Asia. So, in that sense, it's a very major and strategic asset to us." He can't be accused of inconsistency: even in the days of Boris Yeltsin, when Russia was still floundering, he ad-

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vocated driving it from the Caucasus and Central Asia so that energy flows to the West could be guaranteed.

Nowadays Russia is doing better, the U.S. is doing less well, and oil prices have taken off. Victim of its president's provocative actions, with U.S. encouragement, Georgia has just been hit from three directions.

CP

Serge Halimi is the director of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, where this piece also appears.

Translated by Robert Waterhouse.

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rations?

Actually, Todd seems to us a sign that things have moved on from the gloomy portrait of the American working-class male, offered us by Susan Faludi in her book *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. Faludi's blue-collar, backlashing male lived in rage and anguish at his lost estate as bread-winner and lord of the hearth. We don't detect signs of this kind of angst from Todd, a member of the steelworkers' union, who seems at ease as a supportive husband and, more importantly, father. (Frankly, we worry about Bristol's guy, Levi Johnson. This may not have been a wise pick. But we do know that Sarah and Todd will be there to take Bristol and her child in, if all does not prosper with Levi.)

We wish Obama had made the same sort of bold throw as McCain. He could have picked a populist like Senator Jim Webb of Virginia, or Gov. Brian Schweitzer of Montana, or Clare McCaskill, the first-term senator from Missouri, or the Kansas governor, Kathleen Sebelius. Instead, he bowed to establishment pressure, nowhere more than from the Israel lobby, and picked that vizier of the permanent government, Joe Biden. "Change" and "hope" are not words one associates with Senator Joe Biden, a man so ripely symbolic of everything that is unchanging and hopeless about our political system that a computer simulation of the corporate-political paradigm senator in Congress would turn out "Biden" in a nanosecond.

If she makes it to the vice president's office, Sarah Palin will no doubt shake things up. Liberals gasp with rage that she's had friendly relations with the Alaska Independence Party and put on a Buchanan button when he came to Anchorage. These are encouraging signs of independence and, hopefully, of some reserve about the neocons.

Of course the bottom line for liberals, particularly women, is her position on Choice. Which is the image you prefer: a story that Sarah Palin had aborted her baby once she was told of its Down syndrome, and had counseled Bristol to abort her baby so as not to discomode the mother's political campaign? Or, the course that Sarah Palin did take, consistent with her outlook on life and her beliefs?

So, someone opposed to Choice might become vice president. What about all the politicians nominally favoring choice, who have made it virtually impossible since Roe v. Wade for working women to have practical, effective choice? The liberals attack Palin for her position on sex education. But when Jocelyn Elders, Clinton's surgeon general, spoke publicly about the merits of masturbation and condoms, she was immediately fired. There are postures, and there are principled positions. We prefer the latter.

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